

Travel Scene



Thursday, June 14, 1990

Boats revel in steamship era

By Roberta Schwartz
special writer

Although Detroit's two historic steamers, the *Columbia* and *St. Clair*, no longer leave from the old dock at the foot of Woodward, they still create the sense of wonder and excitement that they did when they were first launched 100 years ago.

These two busy steamers survived when other historic ships like the famed *Put-in-Bay*, *Tashmoo* and *City of Detroit III* were either burned or junked. Today, they announce the coming of summer with their shuttles to Bobo Island, 18 miles from Detroit.

These clarions of summer announce the coming of the season as they ferry the great-grandchildren of passengers they delighted many years ago. They have become part of the life fabric of thousands of Michiganders who love the twin vessels.

In the 1950's interest in excursion boating declined as more people invested in their own pleasure craft. And yet, the immaculate white and blue of the Bobo steamers continues to glide from one century to the next without hesitation.

Their 90 minute trips to the small green island of picnics and amusement rides has become a seasonal tradition to thousands of families.

Bobo boats recall a bygone era when steamships were king of the Great Lakes. In the 1890's the Detroit, Belle Isle and Windsor Ferry Company operated a regular service that carried passengers from Detroit and Windsor to local resorts. It soon acquired Bois Blanc Island that was changed to Bobo Island in 1908 when the owners decided that name was easier to pronounce.

Bois Blanc was the French name (white woods) that honored the beautiful white birches and beach trees that swayed and shimmered in the cool breezes of the Detroit River.

The island, which was opened in 1898, sits on the Detroit River, within sight of Lake Erie. In 1901, the ferry company asked Frank Kirby to design a new vessel because island trips had become quite popular. The Detroit Shipbuilding Company launched the *Columbia* in 1902 and towed it to the Orleans Street dock for completion.

The *Columbia*, a shiny vessel with three spacious decks to accommodate passengers, measured 216 feet in length and 60 feet in breadth. This trim 968 ton vessel was designed to carry 4,500 people, but today's marine safety standards allow only 2,500.

On her trial run to Bois Blanc Island in July 1902, the *Columbia* set a record by arriving in just 80 minutes, 25 minutes less than the other vessels the ferry company operated. That evening she sailed a moonlight voyage for a church group. In 1914 the ferry company launched the *St. Clair* to accommodate increasing crowds.

Year after year, these two trusty ships carried through the Detroit River loaded with passengers. In 1976, the historic steamships were moved west of Cobo Hall to a spot near the haven of the Detroit and Cleveland Navigation Company.

The Detroit, Belle Isle, and Windsor Ferry Company owned the boats for a half century and in 1949 sold their holdings to Troy H. Browning. The Browning family worked to improve the island and kept the boats from extinction when other similar crafts were destroyed one by one. In 1979, the Browning family sold its interest to a group of investors and four years later the Automobile Club of Michigan bought the company and rescued it from bankruptcy.



SHERRY KAHAN

Clad in buckskin this staff member of Fort Clatsop, demonstrates a wood vise. It was often used to make sharp points on logs to guard front and rear exits of the fort.

LOG CABINS AND BUCKSKIN INHABIT THE NORTHWEST

By Sherry Kahan
special writer

In high wind, 31 men, one woman, one baby and one Newfoundland dog fled the tides and storms of the Pacific Ocean, looking for a calmer place to camp.

Making their way along the Columbia River in five dugout canoes, they turned in to a smaller part of water. Soon they beached their boats on the edge of a dense forest.

Tall Douglas fir trees rose above them, along with Grand fir, Sitka spruce, Western Red Cedar, Mountain Hemlock and Red Alder.

In spring, summer or fall, sunlight would slice through the branches of these trees and the forest would be blossoming and protective. But this sodden crew, members of the Lewis and Clark expedition, arrived in December 1805, in the cold, dampness of winter when the woods are like a rain forest with water dripping from every limb.

THE EARLY 19th century Lewis and Clark crew were sent by President Thomas Jefferson to explore unclaimed and unknown parts of the northwest. The presence of Americans was believed to help establish a United States claim to the territory.

Located on the northwest corner of Oregon near the Columbia River and four miles from the Pacific Ocean, the 125-acre property, originally settled upon by the Lewis and Clark crew is now called Fort Clatsop National Memorial. Owned by the federal government, it is administered by the National Park Service, which in 1989 welcomed approximately 207,000 people.

The name, Fort Clatsop, was chosen because of the friendly Clatsop Indians.



SHERRY KAHAN

Smoke drifts from a chimney at Fort Clatsop on a warm spring morning.

Captain Meriwether Lewis and Captain William Clark were the leaders of the Northwest expedition. They admired each other's abilities and were long-time friends. Clark named his first son Meriwether.

ONCE THE explorers left the forest in March 1806 to return home, their fort gradually deteriorated and disappeared. Small efforts to memorialize the site were made in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

But success did not come until 1955, the year of the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial. Groups from the nearby port city of Astoria, Ore., joined with the

Oregon Historical Society to build a replica of the original fort. Three Finnish carpenters from Astoria are credited with the actual construction.

Other areas of interest near Fort Clatsop include the city of Astoria, the first permanent settlement in the U.S. west of the Rockies. In 1811, it was a busy fur trading center. The city boasts the first port for ships entering the Columbia River, a Maritime Museum and three other museums celebrating the town's history. Charter fishing is available, and the nearby deactivated Fort Stevens is now a state park.

South of Fort Clatsop is the town of Seaside, where a replica of the salt works used by the explorers can be seen.

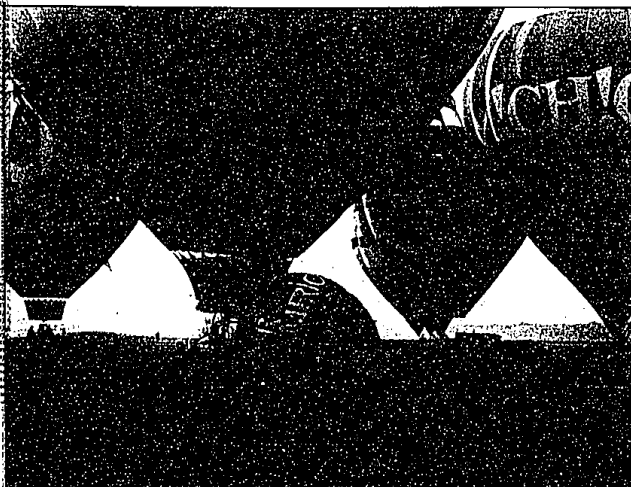
THE HIGH waterfalls along the scenic Columbia Gorge drive should not be missed and anyone who enjoys the sight of ocean water crashing against rocks or rolling in on smooth beaches will want to take a drive along the Oregon Coast. All beaches are public and camping places are available in the area.

The coast is very popular so tourists should make reservations by writing, calling or visiting the Chamber of Commerce in cities along the coast.

These events take place on weekends in late spring, and daily from mid-June to Labor Day.

Driving into the Fort Clatsop National Memorial, the first building in sight is the Visitor Center, which is being expanded this year to triple its size. It features audio-visual material on the expedition, wall maps, memorabilia and a bronze statue which includes Lewis and Clark, a Clatsop Indian and Lewis' dog, Seaman.

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MICKY JONES

Great Lakes' balloons take riders up and away

Summer is fun. It starts officially June 21, but we are already celebrating the great life of the Great Lakes.

It's fun, but sometimes we see only the surface, the ships sailing by on our wonderful waterways or the balloons going up in festivals that are already in full swing. The Michigan Travel Bureau publishes the Michigan Summer Travel Guide and Calendar of Events.

The bureau has 40 pages of summer events to list, and that doesn't include the many events that didn't make the list because their organizers couldn't get their acts together in time.

FOR THE second year, the Michigan Travel Commission chose a few of Michigan's festivals to highlight as part of the "Celebrate! the Great Lakes Festivals" promotion.

Four of them are over: Blossomtime in Benton Harbor, Tulip Time in Holland, the Highland Festival in Alma and the Lilac Festival on Mackinac Island.

The Frankenmuth Bavarian Festival started June 9 and will go on through June 16. The Battle Creek International Balloon Championship comes up this weekend, June 16-23.

I'VE HEARD a lot of Michigan tourism statistics — 3,000 miles of Great Lakes shoreline, 11,000 inland lakes, 830,000 pleasure boats — but there was one statistic in this little guidebook that really startled me. "The water that flowed from Canada into Lake Superior at the start of the celebration last year won't flow out to the North Atlantic for another 321 years."

That gives you an idea about who or what is running this world of ours, and it isn't the guys who make the fireworks. That started me thinking about the origins of some of

crossroads

Iris Sanderson Jones



these festivals, and since the one in Battle Creek is coming up, it made me think about balloons.

WE THINK of hot air balloons as old-fashioned, linking us to 19th century stories like "Around the World in 80 Days." The truth is that man existed for thousands of years without the slightest concept of "heavier than air contrivances."

Oh yes, we tried to fly and usually broke our necks doing it, but it took a couple of French brothers to make it work with balloons.

Jacques Etienne and Joseph Montgolfier, paper manufacturers, filled a 33-foot diameter paper balloon with smoke from a straw fire in Annonay, near Lyons, France, on June 15, 1783.

It rose a thousand feet. They soon realized that it was heat and not smoke that made the balloon rise; air expands when heated, so a given volume weighs less than the same volume of cold air.

ON JAN. 7, 1785, Jean Pierre Blanchard of Philadelphia and U.S. physician J. Jeffries crossed the English Channel in a balloon.

They threw out every bit of ballast, including some of their own clothes, to stay aloft above the water and land 12 miles from Calais, France.

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Balloon festivals like this one in Traverse City float through the state every summer. The Battle Creek International Balloon Championship is scheduled for June 16-23.